

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

455 MARKET STREET, SUITE 300
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105
PHONE: (415) 904-5202
WEB: WWW.COASTAL.CA.GOV



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DATE: APRIL 15, 2026

TO: Coastal Commission and Interested Persons

FROM: Kate Huckelbridge, Executive Director
Sarah Christie, Legislative Director
Sean Drake, Legislative Manager

SUBJECT: LEGISLATIVE REPORT FOR APRIL 2026

CONTENTS: This report provides summaries and status of bills affecting the Coastal Commission and the California Coastal Management Program, and other coast-related legislation identified by staff.

Note: Information contained in this report is accurate as of April 10, 2026. Bills added since the previous report are marked by an asterisk (*). Substantive amendments are summarized in *italics*. Bill text, votes, analyses, and the current status of any bill may be viewed on the California Legislature's Homepage at <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/>. This report can also be accessed through the Commission's homepage at www.coastal.ca.gov.

2026 Legislative Calendar

Jan 1	Statutes take effect.
Jan 5	Legislature reconvenes.
Jan 10	Budget Bill must be submitted by Governor.
Jan 16	Last day for policy committees to hear and report to fiscal committees fiscal bills introduced in that house in 2025.
Jan 23	Last day for committees to hear and report to the Floor bills introduced in that house in 2025.
Jan 31	Last day for each house to pass bills introduced in that house in 2025.
Feb 20	Last day for bills to be introduced.
Mar 26	Spring Recess begins upon adjournment.
Apr 6	Legislature reconvenes from Spring Recess.
Apr 24	Last day for policy committees to hear and report fiscal bills introduced in that house.

May 1	Last day for policy committees to hear and report non-fiscal bills introduced in that house.
May 8	Last day for policy committees to meet prior to June 1.
May 15	Last day for fiscal committees to hear and report to the Floor bills introduced in that house.
May 26-29	Floor session only.
May 29	Last day for each house to pass bills introduced in that house.
June 1	Committee meetings may resume.
June 15	Budget Bill must be passed by midnight.
June 25	Last day for legislative measures to qualify for the November 3 General Election ballot.
July 2	Last day for policy committees to meet and report bills. Summer Recess begins upon adjournment.
Aug 3	Legislature reconvenes from Summer Recess.
Aug 14	Last day for fiscal committees to meet and report bills to the Floor.
Aug 17-31	Floor session only.
Aug 21	Last day to amend bills on the Floor.
Aug 31	Last day for each house to pass bills. Recess begins upon adjournment.
Sept 30	Last day for Governor to sign or veto bills.
Nov 3	General Election
Dec 7	Convening of the 2027-28 legislation session.

PRIORITY LEGISLATION

COASTAL ACT AMENDMENTS

[AB 1740 \(Zbur\) Coastal resources: coastal development permits](#)

This bill would create a process for coastal cities to self-certify as “urban multimodal communities,” a designation created by the bill. In any “urban multimodal community,” numerous project types—including but not limited to housing, transportation projects, removal of public parking, and expansion of existing structures—would be exempt from the Coastal Act’s public access and resource protection policies. Separately, the bill would also exempt from the Coastal Act any project to reconfigure a state highway, including the relocation or removal of roadside parking, so long as the project includes installation of a bicycle lane. *Amendments of 04/06/25 expand the bill to unincorporated county areas that meet certain criteria; explicitly state that the exemptions in the bill supersede certified Local Coastal Programs (LCPs); establish narrow exclusions from exempted areas near the shoreline, wetlands, and sensitive habitats; add film productions to the list of exempted project types; and limit the statewide highway project exemption to allow for relocation but not removal of roadside parking.*

Introduced	02/05/26
Last Amended	04/06/26
Status	Assembly Natural Resources Committee (4/13)
Position	Oppose Unless Amended (recommended)

[*AB 2254 \(Addis\) Coastal resources: local coastal program: monarch butterfly habitat](#)

As amended, this bill would require the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Coastal Commission, by January 1, 2028, to identify monarch butterfly overwintering habitat sites in the coastal zone and current local government monarch butterfly overwintering habitat management plans or policies. The bill would also require CDFW and the Commission, by July 1, 2028, to develop and provide guidance on model land use policies, including LCP policies, for local government to use to protect and enhance monarch butterfly overwintering habitat. The bill would also require any coastal local government with identified monarch butterfly overwintering habitat within its coastal zone, whenever it next amends its LCP, to include monarch butterfly overwintering habitat protection policies.

Introduced 02/19/26
Last Amended 04/08/26
Status Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee (4/14)

[AB 2373 \(Dixon\) California Coastal Act: local coastal program: sea level rise plan: neighborhood-scale adaptation approach](#)

This bill would add language to the Coastal Act explicitly authorizing local governments to use a “neighborhood-scale adaptation approach” when developing sea level rise policies and implementation measures for their local coastal programs. The bill would authorize the neighborhood-scale adaptation approach to include the identification of specific areas and assets that are subject to the approach, and policies that reflect the shared planning features and specific preferred adaptation strategies for different areas or development types based on the geophysical and land use characteristics.

Introduced 02/19/26
Status Assembly Natural Resources Committee (4/20)

[AB 2410 \(Ellis\) Wildfire safety: fuels reduction projects: California Environmental Quality Act: California Coastal Act](#)

Relevant to the Coastal Commission, this bill would exempt from the Coastal Act specified types of vegetation removal done as part of a wildfire fuel reduction projects in the coastal zone. The bill would also create a similar exemption within the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The bill would further require the Natural Resources Agency and the California Environmental Protection Agency to provide a report to the Legislature by January 31, 2028 on implementation of the Governor’s March 1, 2025 Executive Order suspending certain state laws, including the Coastal Act, for wildfire fuel reduction projects.

Introduced 02/20/26
Status Assembly Natural Resources Committee (4/20)

***AB 2791 (Assembly Natural Resources Committee) Public resources**

Relevant to the Coastal Commission, this bill would make non-substantive, technical amendments to various sections of the Coastal Act, including cleaning up outdated references to the California State University and Colleges (now the California State University), and adding clarifying cross-references to existing statutory definitions.

Introduced 03/17/26
Status Assembly Natural Resources Committee (4/20)

SB 675 (Padilla) California Environmental Quality Act: environmental development leadership projects: streamlining

As amended, this bill would establish a new, truncated Coastal Act review process for a “Waterfront Environmental Development Leadership Project” (WELDP). The definition of a WELDP would apply specifically to the proposed Seaport San Diego project at the Port of San Diego. The bill would require the Commission to review and comment within 60 days on any project documents submitted to the Commission prior to the Port’s certification of a project EIR; any objections not raised at that time would be deemed waived. The bill would also require the Commission, within 30 days of receiving a proposed Port Master Plan (PMP) amendment for the Seaport San Diego project, to provide the Port with a list of all technical documents needed for the Commission to act on the amendment. The Commission would be required to take final action on the PMP amendment within 90 days of receiving those documents. The bill would further require the Commission to take final action on any CDP appeal for the Seaport San Diego project within 180 days. The bill also would prohibit the Commission from imposing conditions on any appealed CDP for the Seaport San Diego project that are not “objectively necessary” to render the project consistent with the PMP and the Coastal Act, and that render the project infeasible.

Introduced 02/21/25
Last Amended 07/07/25
Status Assembly Natural Resources Committee
Position Oppose

SB 681 (Wahab) Housing

This bill is the Senate housing omnibus bill. Relevant to the Coastal Commission, the bill would require the Commission, by July 1, 2027, to create a process for electronic submittal to the Commission of any application required under the Coastal Act. *Amendments of 05/23/25 would prohibit local approvals of multi-unit residential projects from being appealed to the Commission on the basis that the project is located in a sensitive coastal resource area or is not the principally permitted use of the site; and would require the Commission to submit an annual report to the Legislature with information about CDP appeals of multi-unit residential projects.*

Introduced 02/21/25
Last Amended 05/23/25
Status Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee

SB 741 (Blakespear) Coastal resources: coastal development permit: exemption: Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor

This bill would amend the Coastal Act to specify that whenever an emergency is declared by a local government or special district, development in that jurisdiction is entitled to an Emergency Coastal Development Permit under Public Resources Code Section 30624. *Amendments of 04/21/25 revise the bill to, instead, expand the existing Coastal Act exemption for like-for-like emergency repairs to state highways, to also apply to like-for-like repairs to train tracks and associated facilities along the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor.*

Introduced 02/21/25
Last Amended 04/21/25
Status Assembly Natural Resources Committee

SB 963 (Laird) California Coastal Act of 1976: coastal development permits: appeal: de novo review

This bill would establish deadlines by which the Commission must review and take final action on local CDP appeals that raise a substantial issue. Under the bill, upon finding that an appeal raises a substantial issue, within 30 days the Commission would be required to review the local permit record for the project and provide the applicant with a complete list of what additional information, if any, is needed to hold a de novo hearing and take final action on the project. Once all the originally requested information is received by the Commission, the Commission would be required to hold the de novo hearing and take final action on the project within 180 days.

Introduced 02/03/26
Last Amended 03/09/26
Status Senate Natural Resources Committee (4/14)

SB 1229 (Allen) Coastal resources: coastal development permits: disaster exemption

This bill would limit the applicability of the coastal development permit exemption for rebuilding a structure destroyed by a natural disaster to the property owner of record immediately preceding the disaster. *Amendments of 03/25/26 specify that the exemption would still apply to subsequent purchasers if the post-disaster replacement structure does not encroach on state tidelands, sensitive habitat or habitat buffers, public access or open space easements, or bluff setbacks.*

Introduced 02/19/26
Last Amended 04/09/26
Status Senate Appropriations Committee

***SB 1318 (Allen) Coastal resources: local coastal program: coastal development permit: non-owner-occupied short-term rentals**

This bill would require the Commission to approve any Coastal Development Permit or Local Coastal Program amendment restricting or prohibiting unhosted short-term rentals, regardless of the availability of other visitor-serving accommodations.

Introduced 02/20/26
Last Amended 03/25/26
Status Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee (4/21)

***SB 1433 (Committee on Judiciary) Maintenance of the codes**

This bill would make non-substantive, technical amendments to Sections 30166, 30168, and 30600.5 of the Coastal Act.

Introduced 03/05/26
Status Senate Rules Committee

PUBLIC ACCESS

AB 1938 (Irwin) Coastal recreation: designated state surfing reserves

This bill would require the Ocean Protection Council (OPC), on or before July 1, 2027, to establish criteria and an application process for purposes of designating an area of the coastline as a “state surfing reserve.” Eligibility criteria may include a letter of recommendation from the Coastal Commission. The bill would authorize a local government to, after adopting a formal resolution, apply to OPC for purposes of designating an area of the coastline as a state surfing reserve. The bill would further establish a process for OPC to approve and notify the public of state surfing reserves, and would require OPC to include designated surfing reserves in the state’s 30x30 goal. *Amendments of 03/25/26 remove the provision regarding a letter of recommendation from the Commission, remove the provision requiring OPC to count surfing reserves toward the state’s 30x30 goal, and make other clarifying revisions.*

Introduced 02/13/26
Last Amended 03/25/26
Status Assembly Appropriations Committee

***AB 1976 (Wicks) Streets and highways: pedestrian and bicycle facilities**

This bill would amend state Pedestrian Mall Law to eliminate the notice and hearing procedures for the establishment of a pedestrian mall, and would instead authorize any local government to adopt a resolution or ordinance to establish a pedestrian mall, in which vehicular parking would be prohibited. Relevant to the Coastal Commission, the bill would declare that establishment of a pedestrian mall to be consistent with the public access requirements of the Coastal Act, and would also exempt from CEQA the establishment or expansion of a pedestrian mall. Separately, the bill would prohibit local governments from holding a community meeting to gather public input on a proposed pedestrian or bicycle safety project after the project has been included in the circulation element of the local government's general plan; would prohibit local governments from terminating pedestrian or bicycle projects except in certain circumstances.

Introduced 02/13/26
Last Amended 04/09/26
Status Assembly Transportation Committee (4/20)

AB 2356 (Ramos) State parks: Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation: Tolowa Dunes State Park

This bill would direct the Department of General Services to transfer all land in Tolowa Dunes State Park, located in coastal Del Norte County, to the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation at no cost, and to terminate any and all rights held by the state regarding those lands.

Introduced 02/19/26
Last Amended 03/23/26
Status Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee

***AB 2734 (Hart) Vehicles: special interest license plates**

As amended, this bill would shift the revenue allocation for the Whale Tail License Plate so that 100% of the monies support coastal access, marine education, coastal stewardship and local assistance grant programs provided by the California Coastal Commission (CCC) and the State Coastal Conservancy. The bill would direct the Department of Motor Vehicles to deposit one half of total revenues generated by annual plate sales, renewals, replacement and personalization of Whale Tail Plates into the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account to support the Coastal Commission's Whale Tail Grant program and public education, and one half into the State Coastal Conservancy Fund (CCF) to support Explore the Coast grants.

Introduced 02/20/26
Last Amended 04/06/26
Status Assembly Natural Resources Committee (4/20)
Position Support (recommended)

NATURAL RESOURCES

***AB 1536 (Addis) Offshore oil: pipeline safety**

As amended, this bill would make multiple statutory changes intended to increase oil pipeline safety. Relevant to the Coastal Commission, the bill would make any repaired pipeline near environmentally and ecologically sensitive areas in the coastal zone subject to the requirement to use best available technology based on a risk analysis conducted by an independent expert, rather than the operator, and require that analysis to address oil spill prevention; and would require an operator seeking approval for a new well, production facility, or specified pipelines in the coastal zone to submit an oil leak detection and response plan to the Geologic Energy Management Division for approval prior to obtaining approval for the new well, production facility, or specified pipeline. This bill would authorize the Coastal Commission to adopt regulatory standards for pipeline leak detection and repair, provided those standards are more protective than federal standards.

Introduced 01/05/26
Last Amended 04/06/26
Status Assembly Natural Resources Committee (4/13)

***AB 1548 (Pellerin) Conservation: Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority**

This bill would establish the Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority, a regional entity with jurisdiction extending throughout the Monterey Bay region. The bill would provide that the purpose of the authority is to raise and allocate public and private funds for restoring, enhancing, protecting, engaging in long term stewardship, and improving access for the enjoyment of natural and working lands. The bill would require the Authority's nine-member governing board to, among other things, establish policies for operation of the Authority, and convene an advisory committee to assist and advise the board in carrying out its functions. The bill would also authorize the Authority to receive and to award grants, levy taxes, issue bonds, and enter into joint powers agreements. *Amendments of 04/06/26 made minor, clarifying changes.*

Introduced 01/07/26
Last Amended 04/06/26
Status Assembly Natural Resources Committee (4/13)

AB 2099 (M. González) Advertising displays: customary maintenance

This bill would create a definition of "customary maintenance" for billboards in the Outdoor Advertising Act that would include fortification of a billboard structure with stronger materials. The effect would be to expand the universe of activities that are exempt from local or state review, extending the life of billboards, including those in sensitive natural habitats, cultural resource sites, or designated scenic corridors.

Introduced 02/18/26
Status Assembly Appropriations Committee

AB 2647 (Calderon) Energy: nuclear facilities: advanced nuclear reactors

This bill would specify that the prohibition on new nuclear fission thermal powerplants in California does not apply to an “advanced nuclear reactor”, defined in the bill defined as having design characteristics that provide enhanced safety features, reduced waste generation, improved fuel use, and other technological advancements. Amendments of 04/06/26 *would require the California Energy Commission, before making a determination that an advanced nuclear reactor is not subject to the prohibition, to verify that the owner, operator, or developer of the advanced nuclear reactor has committed to meet certain labor requirements.*

Introduced 02/25/26
Last Amended 04/06/26
Status Assembly Natural Resources Committee

ACR 149/SCR 136 (Hart, Laird) California Coastal Act of 1976; State Coastal Conservancy

This Assembly Concurrent Resolution and Senate Concurrent Resolution would commemorate the 50th anniversary of the passage of both the California Coastal Act and the State Coastal Conservancy Act, as well as the significant coastal conservation, public access, restoration, and sustainable development achievements the state has achieved through both statutes.

Introduced 02/25/26
Status Assembly Third Reading/Senate Third Reading

SB 10 (Padilla) Otay Mesa East Toll Facility Act: toll revenues

This bill would authorize revenues generated by the Otay Mesa East Toll Facility to be used to fund maintenance of the South Bay International Boundary and Water Commission sewage treatment facility pursuant to an agreement with the federal government. *Amendments of 03/13/25 add that toll revenues may also be used to fund development of additional sanitation infrastructure projects related to the Tijuana River.*

Introduced 12/02/25
Last Amended 03/13/25
Status Assembly Transportation Committee

SB 949 (Becker) Environmental protection: Natural Resources Agency: resource of statewide significance: Santa Cruz Mountains

As amended, this bill would declare the Santa Cruz Mountains to be a resource of statewide significance that requires special protection. The bill would require the Natural Resources Agency to encourage collaborative stewardship approaches to protect, restore, and preserve the natural ecosystems of, and public access to, the region.

Introduced 02/02/26
Last Amended 03/11/26
Status Senate Appropriations Committee

SEA LEVEL RISE

AB 2051 (Wicks) Public resources: Coastal Resilience Permitting Working Group

This bill would require the Secretaries of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection to convene a working group to develop a permitting roadmap for coastal resilience projects along the coast and the San Francisco Bay shoreline by January 1, 2028. The working group would to consist of representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, including, among others, the Coastal Commission and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). The bill would also require the Coastal Commission and BCDC, by April 1, 2027, to convene an advisory group of agencies, industries, and other constituencies to support the working group. *Amendments of 03/25/26 would make the Natural Resources Agency responsible for convening the advisory group, and make other clarifying revisions to the bill.*

Introduced 02/18/26
Last Amended 03/25/26
Status Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee (4/14)

***SB 1324 (Blakespear) Passenger and freight rail: LOSSAN Rail Corridor: working group report**

This bill would extend the deadline for the multiagency Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor working group to submit to the Legislature a report containing consensus recommendations for ensuring the long-term viability of the rail corridor, from February 2026 to February 2027.

Introduced 02/20/26
Last Amended 03/23/26
Status Senate Rules Committee

HOUSING

AB 1294 (Haney) Planning and zoning: housing development: standardized application form

As amended, this bill would require the Department of Housing and Community Development to adopt a standardized application form that applicants for any housing project may use, and would require a local government to accept the standardized application form or a similar standardized form created by the local government. The bill would prohibit local governments from requiring submission of any other application form beside the standardized application form as part of entitling a housing project. The bill would also prohibit local governments from requiring any additional information or process before entitling a housing project, including preapplication submissions, approvals, reviews, meetings, public notices, or any other preapplication requirements.

Introduced 02/21/25
Last Amended 07/03/25
Status Senate Local Government Committee

***AB 1953 (Lowenthal) Short-term rentals: emergencies and special events**

This bill would require the state Office of Emergency Services and the Office of Tourism to establish a public registration system of short-term rentals statewide. The bill would prohibit any state or local agency from regulating the operation of any registered short-term rental during a declared state of emergency or special event. The bill would require the Office of Tourism to define specific special event periods and to post that information online at least 180 days prior to the event.

Introduced 02/13/26
Last Amended 03/19/26
Status Assembly Economic Development, Growth, and Housing Impact Committee

AB 2433 (Alvarez) Housing development: density bonus

This bill would make an array of changes to state Density Bonus Law, including renaming it to the “Affordable Homes Bonus Program”; making density bonus projects subject to by-right, ministerial approval; increasing the number of development incentives and concessions that an applicant is eligible to receive; and affirming that the granting of a waiver or reduction of development standards shall not require or be interpreted to require a general plan amendment, local coastal plan amendment, zoning change, or other discretionary approval. *Amendments of 03/26/26 specify that a density bonus project shall be subject to by-right, ministerial approval if it meets certain siting, affordability, and labor standards; among other changes.*

Introduced 02/20/26
Last Amended 04/07/26
Status Assembly Local Government Committee (4/15)

SB 677 (Wiener) Housing development: transit-oriented development

As amended, this bill would clarify that for purposes of streamlining of transit-oriented development pursuant to SB 79 (Ch. 512, Stats. 2025), “*high-frequency commuter rail*” means a public commuter or intercity rail station with a total of at least 48 passenger trains on average per weekday across all directions, not including temporary service changes of less than one month or unplanned disruptions, and not meeting the standard for very high frequency commuter rail, at any point in the past three years.

Introduced 02/21/25
Last Amended 01/08/26
Status Assembly Rules Committee

SB 1116 (Caballero) Planning and zoning: housing development projects: subdivisions

This bill would make several amendments to the portion of Planning and Zoning Law that provides for local ministerial approval of certain subdivisions resulting in 10 or fewer parcels, including relaxing the requirement that the site be surrounded by urban uses, decreasing the minimum parcel size, and prohibiting a local government from imposing front or internal setbacks or other standards that would preclude the construction of the number of residential units allowed on the parcel under Planning and Zoning Law.

Amendments of 04/06/26 would require every local government to submit its subdivision ordinance to the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) within 60 days after adoption for HCD to evaluate the ordinance's compliance with law; would make void and unenforceable any covenant, restriction, or condition contained in any deed or other instrument that effectively prohibits or unreasonably restricts the construction, use, or sale of homes in a common-interest development on lots zoned for residential use that meet the criteria for ministerial approval of a subdivision; and delays the effective date of several provisions of the bill to January 1, 2027

Introduced	02/17/26
Last Amended	04/06/26
Status	Senate Local Government Committee (4/22)

ADMINISTRATIVE

AB 35 (Alvarez) Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024: Administrative Procedure Act: exemption: program guidelines and selection criteria

As amended, this bill would exempt the development and adoption of program guidelines and selection criteria needed to effectuate or implement the programs included in the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 ("Prop 4") from the Administrative Procedures Act (APA), in line with the APA exemption provided in the past natural resource general obligation bonds. This bill has an urgency clause.

Introduced	12/02/24
Last Amended	01/14/26
Status	Senate Rules Committee

AB 880 (Bennett) State governments grants and contracts: payment of claims and grantees' indirect costs

This bill would establish that existing statutory penalty for late payment of a grant by a state agency also apply to grant agreements between a state agency and a non-profit organization. This bill would require a state agency administering a grant program to reimburse a grantee's indirect costs at specified rates as requested by the grantee in their grant program application, unless prohibited by any other state or federal law.

Introduced 02/19/25
Status Senate Appropriations Committee

AB 1039 (Hart) State-funded assistance grants and contracts: advance payments

The bill would require any state agency that administers a grant program to advance payment to a qualifying recipient for all grants advertised after January 1, 2026. The bill would require the solicitation for the grant to state the percentage of the grant funds that may be distributed as an advance payment. *Amendments of 06/18/25 would require any state agency that administers a grant program to consider utilizing advance payment best practices and processes identified and developed by the Strategic Growth Council.*

Introduced 02/20/25
Last Amended 06/18/25
Status Senate Appropriations Committee

AB 1593 (Dixon) State agencies: revenue: report

This bill would require any state agency that imposes monetary charges, including a regulatory fee or administrative penalty, to report the revenue generated from those charges on its internet website. *Amendments of 03/23/26 would require the reports to be made available for download in machine-readable format.*

Introduced 01/15/26
Last Amended 03/23/26
Status Assembly Appropriations Committee (suspense file)

AB 2366 (Ávila Farías) Administrative Procedure Act: proposed regulations: cost-of-living impact on residents of the state

This bill would make multiple changes to the state Administrative Procedure Act to require any proposed change in state agency regulations to analyze the impact of the regulation on cost of living.

Introduced 02/19/26
Status Assembly Economic Development, Growth, and Housing Impact Committee (4/14)

###

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

455 MARKET STREET, SUITE 300
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105
PHONE: (415) 904-5202
WEB: WWW.COASTAL.CA.GOV



BILL ANALYSIS [AB 1740 \(Zbur\)](#) As Amended 4/6/26

SUMMARY

This bill would create a process for coastal cities and counties to self-certify as “urban multimodal communities,” a designation created by the bill. In any “urban multimodal community,” numerous project types throughout the coastal zone would be exempt from Coastal Act and Local Coastal Program policies that protect coastal resources and public coastal access. Separately, the bill would also exempt from the Coastal Act any project to reconfigure a state highway, including the relocation of roadside parking, so long as the project includes installation of a bicycle lane.

RECOMMENDED MOTION

I move that the Commission **oppose AB 1740 unless amended** to remove the proposed Coastal Act exemptions, and I recommend a **yes** vote.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The reason for the bill is to expedite urban development, transportation facilities, and an assortment of various other project types in the coastal zone.

EXISTING AND RELATED LAW

The following sections of the Coastal Act contain processes for expediting the Local Coastal Program (LCP) and/or Coastal Development Permit (CDP) process for the various types of development targeted by this bill:

- **Section 30624.7** provides for the issuance of waivers from the CDP process for de minimis development that has no impact on coastal resources.
- **Section 30610.5** allows local governments to submit, and the Coastal Commission to approve, requests to categorically exclude development in an identified urban area from the CDP process.
- **Section 3061.05** directs the Commission, by July 1, 2027, to identify infill areas within at least three local jurisdictions that do not have a certified LCP. In these areas, the Commission is required to categorically exclude 100% affordable housing projects from the requirement to obtain a CDP. This section was enacted by SB 484 (Laird, Ch. 416, Stats. 2025).
- **Section 30610.9** establishes an expedited CDP approval process for film productions. This section was enacted by AB 848 (Kuehl, Ch. 491, Stats. 1999).
- **Section 30610.91** streamlines multimodal transportation projects (e.g., bike lanes, bus lanes, pedestrian projects) in the coastal zone by specifying that traffic studies are not required for the Commission to approve CDPs for such projects,

and by creating an expedited process for local governments to amend their LCPs to provide for multimodal transportation facilities.

- **Section 30610(i)** exempts temporary events that do not pose a significant adverse impact on the environment from the requirement to obtain a CDP.
- **Section 30612.5** specifies that all temporary developments undertaken by the International Olympic Committee or Los Angeles Organizing Committee as part of carrying out the 2028 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games are exempt from the Coastal Act. This section was enacted by AB 149 (Assembly Budget Committee, Ch. 106, Stats. 2025).

Additionally, the following provisions of state law address sea level rise resiliency and parking in coastal communities:

- **Public Resources Code Section 30985 et seq.** requires every local government in the coastal zone to develop a sea level rise plan as part of its LCP by January 1, 2034. This section was enacted by SB 272 (Laird, Ch. 384, Stats. 2023).
- **Government Code Section 65863.3** prohibits any public agency from imposing an increased minimum parking standard as a condition of a permit to remodel, renovate, or add to a single-family residence. This section was enacted by AB 1308 (Quirk-Silva, Ch. 756, Stats. 2023).
- **Government Code Section 65863.2** prohibits any public agency from imposing minimum parking requirements on any residential, commercial, or other development project located within one half mile of public transit. This section was enacted by AB 2097 (Friedman, Ch. 459, Stats. 2022).

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Under the Coastal Act, all new development in the coastal zone must receive a coastal development permit (CDP) or similar approval to ensure projects and activities are carried out consistent with Coastal Act policies. The Coastal Commission is responsible for issuing CDPs for all new development until a local government prepares and submits an LCP that is certified by the Commission. An LCP contains land use policies and implementing ordinances to guide development consistent with the policies of the Coastal Act within a local jurisdiction's coastal zone. LCPs may also include various procedures for expediting, streamlining, or waiving the CDP process for specified types or locations of development. Once a local government's LCP is certified by the Coastal Commission, the local government assumes responsibility for permitting most new development in its coastal zone pursuant to the policies of its LCP.

Currently, local governments with certified LCPs are responsible for issuing CDPs in 90% of the land area of the coastal zone. In the remaining uncertified jurisdictions, which constitute 10% of the land in the coastal zone, the Commission is still the primary permitting authority for new development. Of the 76 local governments located fully or

partly in the coastal zone, there are currently 12 cities that, generally speaking, do not have a certified LCP for their coastal zone¹:

City of Fortuna
City of Monterey
City of Goleta
City of Santa Monica
City of Los Angeles
City of Hermosa Beach

City of Torrance
City of Seal Beach
City of Costa Mesa
City of Aliso Viejo
City of San Clemente
City of Solana Beach

ANALYSIS

AB 1740 would create a process for California’s 76 coastal cities and counties to self-certify as “urban multimodal communities,” a designation created by the bill, after which an array of development types would become exempt from the Coastal Act and Local Coastal Program (LCP) policies. To qualify for self-certification, a city or county segment would need three things: one existing or planned transit stop² anywhere in or within a quarter mile of its coastal zone³, a bicycle lane in or within a quarter mile of its coastal zone, and a local plan that includes targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle crashes. A county LCP segment must also include a census-designated urbanized area or urban cluster.

The universe of development that would be exempt from the Coastal Act throughout the coastal zone of an “urban multimodal community” includes all of the following:

- Mixed-use projects
- Multiunit housing projects
- Expansions of existing structures by up to 50%
- One-time and recurring events lasting up to a year at a time
- Bicycle lanes
- Bus lanes
- Sidewalk projects
- Parking rate increases
- Removal of public parking
- Changing public street parking to resident-only parking
- Motion picture productions
- Outdoor dining expansions

¹ See the Commission’s [Summary of LCP Program Activity in FY 23-24](#) for more detailed information about the LCP status of these and other coastal jurisdictions, including information about grants the Commission has previously awarded to uncertified jurisdictions to support their development of LCPs. There are also several coastal jurisdictions where a part of the jurisdiction’s coastal zone, such as a wetland complex, remains uncertified so that the Commission handles permitting in that sensitive area. These partially uncertified jurisdictions are not included in the list above because their uncertified areas are limited in scope and are generally not targets for future development due to their natural sensitivity.

² Specifically, this would include every existing bus stop served at least every 15 minutes, and all of the following types of transit stops, either existing or planned: rail stops, bus rapid transit stops, ferry terminals served by bus or rail, and every intersection of two or more bus routes that is served at least every 20 minutes.

³ The bill creates and uses the term “coastal access zone,” which includes a jurisdiction’s coastal zone plus all land within a quarter mile in all directions. This geographically broader area would allow cities or counties to rely on bicycle lanes and transit stations that are not within the coastal zone to self-certify as urban multimodal communities.

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Some, but not all, of these exemptions contain narrow exclusions for areas near the shoreline, wetlands, and environmentally sensitive habitat areas (ESHA) under certain circumstances. Separately, the bill would also exempt from the Coastal Act and LCPs any project to reconfigure a state highway, including the relocation of roadside public parking, so long as the project includes installation of a bicycle lane. This part of the bill would immediately apply to the entire coastal zone statewide.

Urban Coastal Management

AB 1740 is based on the premise that the Coastal Act should not apply to urban areas of the coastal zone. However, thoughtful coastal management has always been equally important for developed areas of the coast as it is for less developed areas.

First, it is critical to acknowledge that urban coastal communities contain important coastal resources, precisely because the Coastal Act has protected them for the last 50 years. The Coastal Act's ESHA policies protect rare vernal pools in the City of San Diego; roosting trees for herons and migratory birds in the City of Long Beach; vegetation that serves as overwintering habitat for western monarch butterflies in the Cities of Ventura, Carpinteria, Santa Barbara, and Grover Beach; among other examples. The Act is also the only law that protects public views of the ocean and iconic coastal landscapes from being walled off by private structures seeking exclusive benefit from those views. The Coastal Act and LCPs also protect cultural resources from being destroyed by construction activities. AB 1740 would eliminate many of these protections, allowing various new or expanded developments to proceed without considering potential damage to or destruction of coastal resources.

Moreover, one of the highest priorities of the Coastal Act is to protect public access to California's coastal lands and waters, which belong to all the people. This includes protecting physical access by prohibiting shoreline development from blocking the public's ability to reach the coast. In this respect, the Coastal Act is even more vital in urban communities given that pressures to develop the shoreline are greatest near population centers.

More broadly, providing meaningful public access to the coast also includes ensuring that coastal communities are designed to allow visitors from inland areas, which are disproportionately lower income, to experience the coast easily and affordably. This includes planning for how inland visitors reach coastal communities. As California strives to move away from a transportation system centered around driving and parking private vehicles, the Commission is actively encouraging communities to plan for and construct multimodal transportation networks. The Commission approves such plans and projects regularly.

However, the reality is that many communities are pushing to limit or remove public parking more quickly than they are making progress building out the robust transportation network needed to take the place of parking. In the case of AB 1740, building one bicycle lane and one transit stop somewhere within a quarter mile of the coastal zone does not begin to provide an adequate level of service for inland

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Californians wishing to reach the coast. Similarly, the level of service lost by eliminating public parking would not be adequately compensated by, for example, building a bicycle lane that primarily serves locals, having a public transit stop that is planned but potentially years away from construction, or relocating that parking away from the community or popular coastal area it previously served. In this way, AB 1740 would discard the comprehensive public coastal access planning required by the Coastal Act, in favor of the unconsidered elimination of public parking without ensuring commensurate transportation benefit. This would inequitably tip the scale of coastal access in favor of coastal residents at the exclusion of inland Californians.

Meaningful coastal access also requires providing experiences for visitors of all income levels. This includes providing lower-cost options for visitor-serving amenities (e.g., shops, restaurants) and recreational facilities (e.g., equipment rentals, recreation areas). Given that coastal communities naturally attract higher-cost variations of all of these amenities, affirmatively providing lower-cost alternatives ensures that lower-income Californians are not financially excluded from meaningful coastal visitation. The Coastal Act, and by extension LCPs, protect and require the provision of these lower-cost options in new commercial development. The Coastal Act is the only law that ensures equitable access to the coast in this way. AB 1740 would exempt certain mixed residential-commercial projects from the Coastal Act. Thus, these projects would no longer be required to provide for lower-cost visitor-serving or recreational amenities that appeal to a variety of income levels, even for projects proposed in “Visitor Serving” land use designated areas.

Collectively, the Coastal Act protects coastal resources and public access while simultaneously promoting infill development and infrastructure that minimizes vehicle miles traveled and promotes coastal resiliency. This ensures that sustainable development in urban communities can proceed while also protecting the resources that make those communities world-class destinations to live in, work in, and visit. Fifty years ago, the Legislature understood these realities of urban coastal management. That is why it included urban areas in the coastal zone when it enacted the Coastal Act.

In more recent years, urbanized coastal population centers have also become necessary epicenters for sea level rise planning. LCPs, which the Coastal Act requires all coastal communities to develop and maintain, are the instruments through which the state and local governments are planning for future sea level rise. The Legislature has repeatedly doubled down on LCPs as the preeminent tool for local coastal planning, including by enacting SB 272 (Ch. 384, Stats. 2023), which requires all coastal local governments to incorporate sea level rise adaptation policies in their LCPs by 2034 in order to inform future development decisions.

While this sea level rise planning has been, and will continue to be, valuable in all coastal communities, it is particularly critical in urban stretches of the coast, which house the most residents, serve the most visitors, and contain the greatest density of public infrastructure and private investment. Failing to adequately plan for sea level rise in these communities will have the greatest impact on the personal safety and economic livelihoods of Californians.

However, plans are only effective if they are cohesive. AB 1740 would exempt an array of projects, including major housing, mixed-use, and public infrastructure projects, from needing to be consistent with the local government's LCP. As a result, even if a local government satisfies its statutory requirement to develop and integrate robust sea level rise adaptation policies and standards into its LCP, those policies and standards would be functionally meaningless because they would no longer apply to the most consequential projects. This creates a perverse incentive that would significantly undermine California's efforts to adapt its coastline to current and future climate change.

Recent amendments to the bill, which shrink the geographic applicability of some of the proposed exemptions to avoid areas adjacent to the shoreline, wetlands, and ESHA, do not resolve these concerns. Coastal hazards such as flooding and groundwater emergence are not confined to just the strip of land nearest the shoreline. And as explained below, local governments, particularly uncertified jurisdictions with no experience implementing the Coastal Act, will implement the modest limitations on the bill's exemptions inconsistently. Successful management of California's urban coastal communities and the resources within them occurs through cohesive local planning and permitting that is supported and overseen by the state.

Mechanical Issues

Fundamental questions regarding the bill's operability also raise the question of whether the bill would actually result in a faster development process for Santa Monica and other "urban multimodal communities." For example, there is no required process for verifying that a local government actually meets the eligibility criteria for an urban multimodal community when it declares itself to be one. The bill would give the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation a brief 30 days to verify the local government's eligibility if it chooses to, but such review would be optional. There would be no mechanism for any entity or individual to review or challenge a jurisdiction's self-certification other than in court.

Similarly problematic are the mechanics around renewing the certification. Once a local government has self-certified as an urban multimodal community, that certification would last for 5 years. However, the bill does not address what would happen to a jurisdiction that subsequently loses its certification either because it fails to recertify or because it no longer meets the eligibility criteria. While such a jurisdiction would resume being statutorily required to evaluate all proposed projects for consistency with its certified LCP—assuming it has one—that LCP would necessarily be out of date, with policies, standards, and land use designations reflecting the state of the community five or more years prior. Thus, the local jurisdiction would be constrained in where and how it could permit new development in the coastal zone until it substantially updated its LCP to bring it back up to date. Any development approved despite inconsistencies with outdated LCP policies would be vulnerable to legal challenge. For uncertified jurisdictions, the Commission would have to track and monitor local certifications to determine whether a CDP from the Commission is required for the development types covered by the bill in any given year, and reallocate limited staff resources accordingly.

Furthermore, for each “urban multimodal community,” in order to determine whether a proposed project is exempt from the CDP process, a local government would often be required to determine whether the project would impact public coastal access, as well as the project’s specific proximity to wetlands, ESHA, and the mean high tide line. In practice, all of these determinations involve making complex technical findings rooted in the provisions of the Coastal Act and the Commission’s regulations, as well as discretionary determinations about impacts to coastal resources. AB 1740 would eliminate any Commission oversight of how local governments make such findings, providing maximum interpretative latitude for local governments to make whatever findings are needed to deem a project exempt. Severing the functional coordination between local governments and the Commission in this way runs counter to the state-local collaboration at the heart of the Coastal Act, and would harken back to the pre-Coastal Act era. It would be particularly inappropriate to provide such latitude to local governments without certified LCPs, as many of these jurisdictions have no experience implementing the Coastal Act in the first place.

In the aggregate, these open questions cast doubt on the operability of the bill in practice. In contrast to the pieces of past legislation listed above, which clarify and streamline various aspects of planning and permitting within the framework of the Coastal Act, AB 1740 would overlay an entirely new scheme on top of the Coastal Act’s regulatory program. This overlapping approach would predictably generate an abundance of legal questions that would need to be resolved by the Legislature and courts for years to come, all the while clouding the regulatory landscape in the coastal zone and potentially slowing project delivery contrary to the author’s intent.

Existing Regulatory Tools

The Coastal Act contains policies requiring new development in the coastal zone to prioritize infill development over sprawl (Section 30250) and to minimize vehicle miles traveled (Section 30235). In line with these policy directives, the Commission uses existing regulatory tools in the Coastal Act to expedite construction of infill housing and multimodal transportation facilities. This includes CDP waivers and exemptions for projects that the Commission determines would have little or no impact on coastal resources or public coastal access. The Commission has also established categorical exclusions for certain classes of development including, for example, certain single-family residences, accessory dwelling units that meet certain size requirements, lot line adjustments, minor roadways improvements, certain agriculture-related development, installation of electric utility lines, and others. The Commission is also currently in the process of establishing categorical exclusions for affordable housing projects in several infill areas of the coastal zone.

In addition to leveraging these all-purpose tools for expediting development under the Coastal Act, the Commission has supported the enactment and implementation of legislation that created more specialized tools and processes for expediting specific types of projects. This includes legislation targeting many of the types of projects contemplated by AB 1740, such as housing, highway projects, multimodal transportation projects, temporary events, and film productions. Importantly, all of these

past pieces of legislation expedited project development in a manner that also maintains coastal resource and public coastal access protections. AB 1740 would undermine this prior legislation by simply exempting the targeted project types from the Coastal Act and LCPs. In doing so, the bill would nullify the decades of work done by the Commission and local governments to develop LCPs that carefully harmonize sustainable development, resource protection, and coastal access within communities.

The primary bill sponsor, the City of Santa Monica, has stated a desire to “move faster” on housing and transportation projects. Fortunately, the Coastal Act already contains the aforementioned tools intended for accelerating these types of projects. All of these tools, and more, are available to the 64 coastal cities and counties that have complied with the 50-year-old statutory mandate to develop a Local Coastal Program. Unfortunately, the City of Santa Monica has not done so. The Commission has been committed to helping the City reach this basic milestone, and in fact the Commission has awarded the City three grants totaling \$375,000 to complete its LCP. In the meantime, it would be inappropriate to upend California’s coastal management framework, including all of the important policy priorities described above, in a Coastal Act end-run to accommodate Santa Monica’s development goals.

CONCLUSION

As California celebrates 50 years of coastal protection since the passage of the Coastal Act, AB 1740 would roll back those very protections on an unprecedented scale. The Coastal Act already contains numerous tools for expediting the types of projects targeted by the bill in harmony with California’s other coastal management policy priorities. This bill would nullify those tools in favor of outright permit exemptions, including for those cities that have chosen to eschew the responsibility for coastal management within their borders. This approach undermines the fundamental purpose of the Coastal Act to protect the coast of California as a valuable resource of statewide importance for all the people.

SUPPORT

City of Santa Monica (sponsor)	California Council for Affordable Housing
Abundant Housing LA (sponsor)	California Downtown Association
Streets for All (sponsor)	California Mobility and Parking Association
AARP	California Restaurant Association
Abundant Housing LA	California Travel Association
Abundant Housing Pasadena	California Yimby
Abundant Housing Sunset	Circulate San Diego
Ahla Koreatown	City of Culver City
Alhambra Urbanists	City of Long Beach
Bay Area Council	Climate Resolve
Burbank Abundant Housing	Downtown Santa Monica
Cal Chamber	Dtla 4 All
California Attractions and Parks Association	Eastside Housing for All
California Building Industry Association	Fieldstead and Company, INC.

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Glendale Yimby
Greenbelt Alliance
Housing Action Coalition
Independent Hospitality Coalition
Los Angeles City Councilwoman Traci
Park
Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator
Los Angeles County
Los Angeles County Business
Federation
Midpen Housing Corporation

Move LA
San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria
Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce
Santa Monica Forward
Spur
Urban Environmentalists, Los Angeles
Venice Chamber of Commerce
Westside Council of Chambers of
Commerce
Westside for Everyone

OPPOSITION

Amigos De Bolsa Chica
Audubon California
Azul
Ballona Wetlands Institute
Black Surfers Collective
California Coastal Protection Network
California Coastkeeper Alliance
Citizens Preserving Venice
City Surf Project
Cleaneart4kids.org
Coalition for a Beautiful Los Angeles
Coastal Lands Action Network
Defend Ballona Wetlands
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Action Committee of
West Marin
Environmental Center of San Diego
Escondido Neighbors United
Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks
Friends of Los Peñasquitos Canyon
Preserve
Friends of Sunset Park
Green Foothills

Humboldt Waterkeeper
Inland Empire Waterkeeper
National Parks Conservation
Association
Newport Mooring Association
Ocean Defenders Alliance
Orange County Coastkeeper
Outdoor Outreach
Paddle for Peace
Planning and Conservation League
Queer Surf
Resource Renewal Institute
Salted Roots
Save Our Shores
Sea and Sage Audubon Society
SoCal 350 Climate Action
Surf Justice Collective
Surfrider Foundation
Surfrider Foundation Los Angeles
Chapter
Tubb Canyon Desert Conservancy
Wildcoast

RECOMMENDED POSITION

I move that the Commission **oppose AB 1740 unless amended** to remove the proposed Coastal Act exemptions, and I recommend a **yes** vote.

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

455 MARKET STREET, SUITE 300
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105
PHONE: (415) 904-5202
WEB: WWW.COASTAL.CA.GOV



BILL ANALYSIS

[AB 2734 \(Hart\)](#)

As Amended 4/6/26

SUMMARY

This bill would revise the revenue allocation for the Whale Tail License Plate so that 100% of the money it generates supports coastal access, marine education and coastal stewardship grants and programs provided by the California Coastal Commission (CCC) and the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC). The bill would direct the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to deposit one half of the total revenues generated by annual plate sales, renewals, replacement and personalization of Whale Tail Plates into the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account (CBCEA) to support the Coastal Commission's Whale Tail Grants and public education programs, and one half into the State Coastal Conservancy Fund (CCF) to support Explore the Coast grants.

RECOMMENDED MOTION

I move that the Commission **support AB 2734**, and I recommend a **yes** vote.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The reason for the bill is to provide a long-term, sustainable funding source for both the Whale Tail and the Explore the Coast grant programs to meet growing demand. The author states that on the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Coastal Act and the creation of the State Coastal Conservancy, it's fitting to split the revenues from the state's coastal protection plate 50/50 between the two coastal agencies.

EXISTING AND RELATED LAW

Vehicle Code Section 5067 authorizes the DMV in consultation with the Coastal Commission to design a special environmental license plate with a coastal motif, and establishes the fee structure as follows:

- (1) For the original issuance of the plates, fifty dollars (\$50).
- (2) For renewal of registration of the plates or retention of the plates, forty dollars (\$40).
- (3) For transfer of the plates to another vehicle, fifteen dollars (\$15).
- (4) For each substitute replacement plate, thirty-five dollars (\$35).

Half of these revenues are deposited annually into the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account (CBCEA), and half into the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF).

Vehicle Code Section 5106 establishes a fee of fifty-three dollars (\$53) for issuance of any personalized plate (aka “vanity” plates); and a fee of forty-three dollars (\$43) for annual renewal. All fees (100%) are deposited into the ELPF.

Vehicle Code Section 5108 establishes a fee of forty-three dollars (\$43) for the transfer of a personalization plate (aka “vanity” plate) to another vehicle, trailer, or semitrailer, in addition to all other appropriate fees. All fees (100%) are deposited into the ELPF.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Created in 1994 to fund the Coastal Commission’s Public Education Unit, the Whale Tail License Plate was one of California’s earliest specialty plates. Along with the Protect Our Coast and Ocean (POCO) tax checkoff, the Whale Tail Plate funds the Whale Tail Grant Program, California’s longest-running outdoor education grant program. Whale Tail grants provide support to schools, Tribes and nonprofits for nature-based education, ocean-themed STEM curriculum, and hands-on stewardship activities such as habitat restoration, traditional cultural renewal, and science-centered field trips. Over 95% of Whale Tail grants engage communities facing barriers to coastal access and marine education. These include communities of color, low-income communities, rural communities, LGBTQ+ groups, ESL households, elders, the disabled and families impacted by the carceral system.

Whale Tail revenues also support statewide programs such as Coastal Cleanup Day, the California King Tides Project, Kids Ocean Day and Adopt-A-Beach. Nearly 5.2 million people have participated in education programs and student field trips funded by the Whale Tail plate.

The Coastal Conservancy’s Coastal Access Account is funded by coastal development permit (CDP) fees paid to the Commission by applicants. Every year, the State Controller transfers \$500,000 of the fees (plus an annual CPI adjustment) into the account. These funds are used to support the Conservancy’s Explore the Coast (ETC) grants. Like the Whale Tail grants, demand for ETC grants far outstrips available funds.

ANALYSIS

The Coastal Commission’s Whale Tail Grant Program is California’s longest-running outdoor education grant program, and it is funded by sales of the Whale Tail License Plate. Whale funds support nature-based education, ocean-themed STEM curricula, and hands-on stewardship activities such as habitat restoration, traditional cultural renewal, and science-centered field trips. Plate sales also support statewide programs such as Coastal Cleanup Day, the California King Tides Project, Kids Ocean Day and Adopt-A-Beach. Nearly 5.2 million people have participated in education programs and student field trips funded by Whale Tail grants and programming.

The Whale Tail License Plate is one of 13 specialty plates available for purchase by California vehicle owners and currently generates approximately \$4 million per year. About half of this revenue, around \$2 million, comes from the sale, renewal, and replacement of Whale Tail Plates. These funds are split evenly between the Coastal

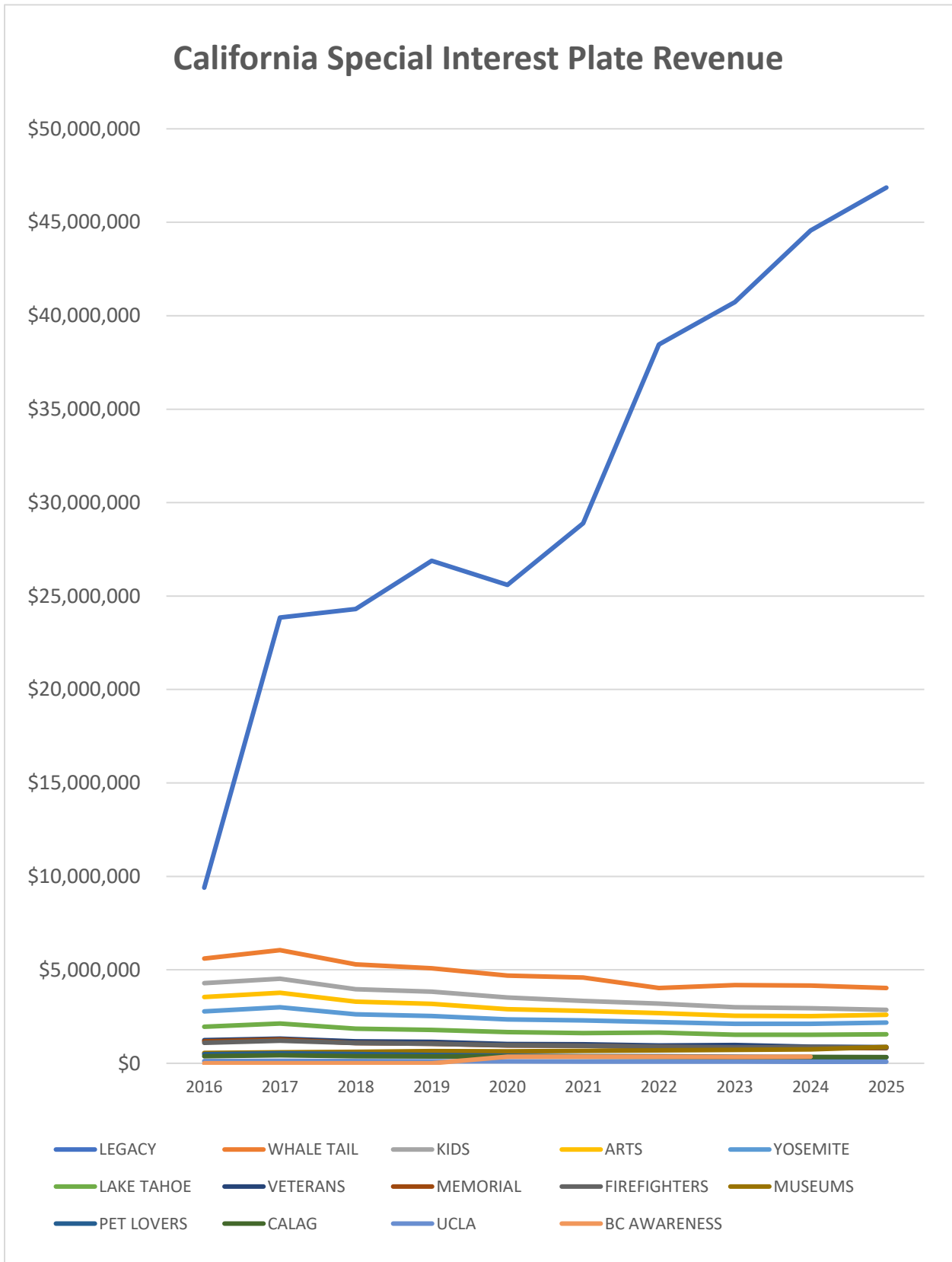
AB 2734 (Hart) Analysis

Commission Whale Tail Grant Program and the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF), which supports a variety of environmental priorities within the CNRA. The other ~\$2 million generated annually by the Whale Tail License Plate comes from “personalization” fees. Existing law allocates 100% of these fees into the ELPF. The net result is that the Coastal Commission receives only about 25% of Whale Tail Plate sale revenues and the ELPF receives approximately 75%.

The option to personalize a vehicle license plate with numbers and letters of the owner’s choosing for an additional fee (a.k.a., a “vanity plate”) pre-dates the advent of special design license plates (such as the Whale Tail, Yosemite and Tahoe plates, etc.) which support specific causes or issues. The ELPF was created in 1970 to receive personalization fees for the purpose of funding discretionary environmental expenditures. As more recent specialty license plates have been created, the funding allocations in the bills that established them have varied. As a result, only the Whale Tail and the Yosemite Plate (the two earliest plates) contribute $\frac{3}{4}$ of their total revenue into the ELPF. By contrast, the California Memorial Plate, the Veterans Plate and the Kids Plate retain all revenues for their sponsoring organizations. Others, such as the Tahoe Plate, Pet Lovers Plate and the Breast Cancer Awareness Plate retain a full 50% of their total revenues. One plate, the black and gold Legacy Plate, has no sponsoring organization, so it contributes 100% of its revenues to the ELPF. This is significant, as the Legacy Plate is also the most popular plate by far, outselling all other specialty plates combined by nearly five times and growing. In 2025, California drivers purchased 66,480 Legacy Plates and generated more than \$46.8 million for the ELPF.

The Legacy Plate rocketed to popularity immediately after it was introduced in 2016, outselling the Whale Tail by nearly double in the first year. With the exception of a brief downturn during the Covid pandemic when supply chain issues impacted all specialty plate sales, the Legacy Plate has sustained an impressive year-over-year revenue increase for the past decade with no indication that it has reached its limit. This popularity is also gradually driving down sales of other specialty plates, as drivers switch to the Legacy Plate from other specialty plates.

Although the ELPF is technically oversubscribed, and supports many vital, ongoing environmental programs, there is a great deal of flexibility in its annual allocation, including one-time expenditures. Given this context, as well as the fact that three new Specialty Pro Sports Plates (the Rams Plate, the Niners Plate and the LA Football Club Plate will likely go on sale within the next year, it is reasonable to conclude that redirecting \$3 million from the ELPF to fund the two coastal grant programs will very likely be more than offset by the continuing upward trend of the ELPF overall, leaving long-term baseline funding for departments intact.



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In contrast, evenly dividing the ~\$4 million in annual Whale Tail Plate funds between the Commission's and the Conservancy's programs would have an outsized immediate, positive impact on coastal access and outdoor education. For the Coastal Commission, this shift would result in approximately an additional \$1 million annually for Public Education programs. Because at least 25% of the grant awards are "microgrants" of \$25,000 or less, this funding will reach a disproportionately larger share of recipients than it would if allocated through ELPF. Microgrants are critical for small organizations and first-time grantees who cannot metabolize and track larger amounts of money. Many microgrant recipients report that their Whale Tail Grants have allowed them to establish a track record of responsible grant administration, which enabled them to successfully apply for other larger grants in later years.

The approximately \$2 million that would be provided to the Conservancy under the proposed funding shift would provide a stable, sustainable funding source for the Explore the Coast Grant Program, which would allow for better planning and expanded outreach to Tribes and other priority groups.

Overall, shifting 100% of the revenues generated by the Whale Tail License Plate into these two coastal grant programs would directly further several state policy priorities:

- **“Outdoors for All”** More than 95% of Whale Tail grants support communities of color, and disproportionately burdened communities facing barriers to coastal access and outdoor educational opportunities. Grants are awarded throughout California, not just coastal areas.
- **STEM Education** All Whale Tail grants have an educational component.
- **Public Coastal Access** Both grant programs connect people to the California coast and ocean and its watersheds.

The proposal also increases government transparency by aligning the revenue allocation with consumers' expectations. California drivers purchase Whale Tail License Plates with the understanding that the additional money they pay is supporting coastal protection, stewardship and public access.

SUPPORT

Outdoor Outreach (Sponsor) Salted Roots (formerly Brown Girls Surf, Sponsor), Tree People (Sponsor)

OPPOSITION

None on file.

RECOMMENDED POSITION

I move that the Commission **Support AB 2734**, and I recommend a **yes** vote.